

Diane Vogt-O'Connor

## U.S. Information Agency Lectures on Archives in Bolivia

In late summer 1996, I received a call from the U.S. Information Agency (USIA) asking me to take part in their U.S. Speaker Program. This program selects speakers able to clarify American policies, opinions, practices, and developments in major subject areas, such as economics, international political relations, social and political processes, the environment, and technology. The topics to be addressed are selected by U.S. overseas missions as being of importance in the dialogue between the host country and the United States. My host country was to be Bolivia, referred to by several authors as "The American Tibet," due to its remoteness and Andean mountain location.

My briefing from the local USIA officer indicated that the groups to whom I would be speaking included:

- In La Paz: About 40-50 representatives from Libraries, Museums, and Information Centers working as a group to develop National Information Law;
- In Sucre: About 50-60 representatives from the Archivo Y Biblioteca Nacionales de Bolivia (ABN) and from other libraries and archives such as the Casa de la Libertad, local universities, and the Potosi Mint House Archives.

### *Topics to be covered included:*

- U.S. information law, including copyright, privacy law, publicity, obscenity, and laws relating to records retention and disposition
- contemporary preservation theory, practice, and techniques;
- current practices and theory on digitization, Web site preparation, and issues relating to the national information infrastructure;
- general collections management advice relating to archival and manuscript collections; and
- an overview of records surveying, appraisal, disposition, and arrangement and descriptive techniques.

### *Bolivian Background Research on the Web*

Before going to Bolivia I researched the country in my home and local libraries and on the World Wide Web. The published sources located were somewhat limited; however, the Web sources provided several hundred pages of extremely useful information including local Quechuan language lessons. The World Fact Book and the Consular Information Sheets were particularly useful.

*This feature will appear as a new department in future non-thematic issues of CRM. If you have participated in a special detail, speaking engagement, training program or other work-related assignment that may be of interest to our readers, write to the editor (see page 2).*

During my researches, I discovered that Bolivia is a geographically-varied country in Central South America, ranging from lowland Amazon Basin plains to the rugged Andes mountains. The Bolivian population of almost 8 million is 95% Catholic, while their ancestry is 30% Quechuan, 25% Ayamaran, 25-30% mestizo (mixed Indian-European ancestry) and between 5-15% European. The average life expectancy is 63 years; the national product per capita in 1994 was \$2,370, while the literacy rate is 80%. While Spanish is the official language of Bolivia, most Bolivians speak Quechuan or other native languages.

About the size of Montana, Bolivia is one of the poorest nations in Latin America with very little arable land. Although Bolivia has few roads and limited railroads, it has immense natural resources of minerals, natural gas, and petroleum. The Bolivian gold, silver, and tin resources attracted Spain during the 16th-19th centuries, leading to a long history of semifeudal social controls. Wild variations in the market value of these resources led to hyperinflation over time.

In the mid-1980s, Bolivia dramatically reduced inflation by implementing free market policies, a free trade agreement with Mexico, and a privatization plan. These measures often came into conflict with Bolivia's powerful labor movement. Land desertification and loss of biodiversity—caused by slash-and-burn agriculture, overgrazing, and international sales of Bolivian tropical timber—also recently became an issue. Bolivia recently signed many international agreements on biodiversity, climate change, endangered species, tropical timber, and similar issues.

### *Work in La Paz*

On Monday morning after registering at the Embassy and meeting the attache, I travelled to the Library of Congress in La Paz. The Library of Congress is a beautifully maintained Spanish revival historic building that formerly was the nation's stock exchange. It now holds the nation's 20,000+ book collection housed in locking oak cabinets.

Senador de la Republica, H. Hans Dellien, introduced the seminar and stressed the importance of managing Bolivia's informational heritage.

Bolivian archivists, librarians, and curators from government and private cultural organizations attended, participating enthusiastically in discussions and question and answer sessions. The participant's questions illustrated an excellent grasp of the issues and a real concern with how to enter the 21st-century age of information technology with limited resources and less-than-extensive training.

The seminars ran from 9:00 until noon and 2:30 until 6:00 each day, allowing the traditional 2.5 hours for a siesta and lunch, the main meal of the day.

My presentations and discussions on October 7th and 8th covered the high points of archival surveying, preservation, arrangement, description, access policies, and legal issues. Participants received a series of handouts in Spanish and English, including the preservation journal *Apuyo*, NEDCC handouts, and National Park Service *Conserve O Grams* on archival preservation and manuals.

The seminar participants expressed concern over the current dispersal of Bolivian governmental records dating from the 1890s-present into warehouses and vaults throughout La Paz. When the legislative capital effectively changed from Sucre to La Paz, the federal records were no longer transferred to the National Archives in Sucre, where all the earlier records of the government reside.

Instead, the 20th-century Bolivian governmental records are scattered in a variety of holding areas. This places the most volatile and controversial portion of the historic record in a very dangerous position both from the point of view of government accountability and from that of preservation and management. Without this written record, much of what has happened in the 20th century in Bolivia can't be adequately studied or understood. The audience felt that a nation without a good memory is one doomed to repeating its mistakes.

After lectures, participants attended break-out discussion sections for several hours daily to discuss issues of information law, records management enforcement, archival management, preservation, and digitization. At the end of the seminar, participants received diplomas and I received invitations to visit the libraries, archives, and museums of the participants, an invitation to return again, and the ceremonial gift of a Bolivian silver tea set with Inca-style ornamentation to commemorate our seminar series.

#### *Visit to the National Archives in Sucre*

On Wednesday morning, October 9th, I flew to Sucre, the historic capital of Bolivia, a city of low white stucco houses, spectacular mountain views, cathedrals, and churches, dating from the

16th century to the present. In Sucre, Mary D. de Solares, Directora Ejecutiva of the Centro Boliviano Americano, was the sponsor of the lecture program. Mary Solares and several members of the Archivo Y Biblioteca Nacional (ABN) met me at the airport with flowers. After checking me into the hostel "Cruz de Popayan," a delightful historic hotel with private baths and several large inner courtyards with fountains, we returned to her house where I met her family over a multi-course lunch, featuring local specialties such as grilled chicken and dried potatoes.

At the Archives, Director Rene Arce, PhD, a historian, offered tours of his repository's holdings. The ABN has an impressive breadth and depth of documentation covering all of post-contact South and Central America, but particularly Peru, Colombia, Bolivia, and the entire Andean plateau region from the 15th-20th centuries. Holdings were particularly rich in diaries, corporate mining accounts, religious records, very early published accounts, and journals. Scholars, particularly anthropologists and social, cultural, and economic historians from all over the world, were working there. The size of the holdings from the 16th and 17th centuries was particularly impressive.

Many Bolivian archival operating procedures differ from those prevalent in the states, including item-level indexing, extensive transcription and commentary on individual documents, and extensive restoration treatments as opposed to preventive conservation. The Archives has adopted the use of computers and is currently using the Minisis program provided by UNESCO.

During the last several years, much of Mr. Arce's time has been spent on planning and marketing the idea of a new building for the National Archives in La Paz. At present, the belief is that groundbreaking for the new four-story underground structure in Sucre will begin under the aegis of a local architect sometime in 1997.

While in Sucre, I taught workshops on archival management and preservation at the Archivo Y Biblioteca Nacional (ABN) to an audience of roughly 60 federal archivists and historians from October 9th-11th. While there, I had several consultations with Rene Arce to discuss his plans for his repository. Of particular interest were the following issues:

- archival preventive conservation such as:
  - handling techniques;*
  - preservation vs use (When are restrictions appropriate?);*
  - duplication policies;*
  - integrated pest management;*
  - housing techniques;*
  - environmental controls;*
  - planning a new structure;*

*preparing for a move;  
ensuring that pest problems don't transfer  
with collections;  
packing, planning, and labeling so provenance and original order are not damaged;  
and  
implementing the time-weighted preservation system.*

Bolivian archivists and librarians are still practicing conservation that is focused on restoration and fumigation. They are interested in investigating preventive conservation via environmental monitoring and management, and appropriate rehousing in order to save money, time, and effort.

- archival automation and how the ABN can analyze collection users, conduct a systems analysis, write a functional requirements statement, and select an automated system, as the Minisis program currently being used by ABN is no longer being supported by UNESCO.

*Home Again*

Following my return from Bolivia on October 14, I wrote a summary report on my experiences

for the USIA, explaining what I had learned about their needs and offering some ideas on future speakers and programs. As a follow-up, I wrote an article for my professional newsletter, *Archival Outlook*, summarizing what help the Bolivian archives hope for in the future from their American colleagues and called several organizations who might be appropriate contacts for Bolivian colleagues. Thinking over my adventures, I was pleased that I had the opportunity to meet my colleagues in Bolivia and share what we follow as "professional practice" in our two countries. I am grateful to the USIA for this chance to visit a country so rich in magnificent landscapes, manuscripts, architecture, folk crafts, and proud traditions and cultures.

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Paul Cloyd

## ICOMOS General Assembly Symposium *Heritage and Social Changes*

An international group of heritage conservation professionals makes up the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS). ICOMOS provides a forum for exchange, evaluation, and distribution of information on conservation principles and techniques. On October 5–9, 1996, the Bulgarian ICOMOS Committee hosted the 11th ICOMOS General Assembly and Symposium in Sofia. I received a grant from the NPS Albright-Wirth fund, enabling my participation in this event. More than 600 delegates and guests from 75 countries traveled to Sofia for the General Assembly.

Our hosts provided an impressive opening ceremony with a group of vocalists presenting solemn traditional national song. A bagpiper provided the music accompaniment. The bagpipe had originated in this region and the Romans later brought the instrument to Great Britain. The opening ceremonies included the award of international preservation's highest honor, the Gazzola Prize, to

Ernest Allen Connally (USA). Dr. Connally was the former Secretary General of ICOMOS and the former chair of US/ICOMOS. Ann Webster Smith, current US/ICOMOS chair, received the award on Dr. Connally's behalf. Her acceptance statements reflected Dr. Connally's high personal and professional regard for Piero Gazzola, ICOMOS' first president, for whom ICOMOS named the award. The US fielded a large delegation with 18 participants. Only Australia and Bulgaria exceeded the US in size of national delegations.

Following the opening ceremonies, the assembly discussed the idea of authenticity. Mr. Herb Stoval, of Canada, concisely updated the assembly on the status of the recent debates on authenticity within ICOMOS. The debates are to establish a broader understanding of "authenticity" within the heritage conservation community. He noted many languages do not specifically include the word authenticity but they do include the idea. When we talk of the value of a site, authenticity is not a value in itself but is a qualifier of the values. It is a measure of completeness and trueness of the values. Mr. Stoval explained that the 1964 *Venice Charter* presented one concept of authenticity, an idea that looked toward the physical heritage of durable materials such as fired brick and stone. Our understanding of authenticity may require broader or differing definitions where heritage is of more readily degradable material wood, earth, and grass. Authenticity